Maine Maritime Museum Library
243 Washington Street
Bath, Maine 04530-1638
(207) 443-1316, ext. 328, 336

Inventory
for

Manuscript Collection
MS-465

James F. Bliss Estate Papers

Inclusive dates 1883-1928
(bulk dates 1922-1928)

by
Nathan R. Lipfert

March 2016

Eight folders
Accession # 2006.087.01

A PART OF THE CAPTAIN W. J. LEWIS PARKER BEQUEST

COPYRIGHT RESTRICTION

The material described herein is the physical property of the Maine Maritime Museum Library. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or the various items, or to their legal representatives, or to Maine Maritime Museum. For further information, consult the library staff.

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be *"used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship or research."* If a user later uses a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if fulfillment of the order is judged to be in violation of copyright law.

It is the user's responsibility to understand the copyright law concerning the use of the historical documents contained in this library.

Copyright © 2016 by the Maine Maritime Museum

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Maine Maritime Museum Library.

Abstract

Bliss, James Frederick (1847-1923)

Estate papers, 1883-1928 (bulk 1922-1928)

Eight folders

Ship chandler and vessel owner of Boston MA.

Correspondence, agreements and financial accounts regarding the Estate of James F. Bliss including the later settlement of a claim for the sinking of the tern schooner *Hattie Dunn*. The papers appear to be received and generated by Charles C. Blaney, lawyer for banker Benjamin B. Perkins, executor of the Estate and heir. Some of the papers pertain to Bliss's partner in James Bliss & Co., Israel E. Decrow.

Bequeathed by Capt. W. J. Lewis Parker in 2006.

MS-465; Accession # 2006.087.01

Finding aid in repository; folder and item level control.

Added entries—people

Blaney, Charles C.

Decrow, Israel E.

Perkins, Benjamin B.

Added entries—places

Boston (MA)

Added entries—corporate bodies (including vessels)

Hattie Dunn (Three-mast schooner)

James Bliss & Co.

Added entries—key terms

Administration of estates

Schooners

Ship chandlers

Ships--Owners

Acquisition

The papers of the James F. Bliss Estate were bequeathed to Maine Maritime Museum from the estate of Capt. W. J. Lewis Parker in November and December 2006.

Provenance

Capt. Parker was an extremely knowledgeable collector. He picked up many parts of his collection of maritime papers by purchase from dealers, auctions, or estate sales, and by gifts from relatives of maritime figures. We have found no documentation of how he acquired this particular group of manuscripts. He was extremely interested in the history of the Dunn & Elliot

yard of Thomaston, builders and managing owners of the tern schooner *Hattie Dunn*, and we suspect that was his primary interest in these particular papers. He collected and bequeathed to us other papers relating to Dunn & Elliot, filed as MS-73. These papers were found in his study with other similar items, and were part of his maritime library which he bequeathed to Maine Maritime Museum.

Restrictions

There are no restrictions on the use of these materials for study or research. Researchers should seek permission to obtain copies, and for publication of any sort.

Physical Condition

Other than the usual surface dirt and minor tears in acidic paper, the manuscripts in this collection are in good condition. Overall, the James F. Bliss Estate Papers are in good condition.

Biographical/Historical Notes

James Frederick Bliss was born on April 7, 1847 to Francis and Alice (Wakefield) Very of Boston, and was adopted at the age of two by James and Louise (Hayden) Bliss of Boston. At the age of 18 he began working in the chandlery his adopted father had established in 1832. In 1872 he became a partner in the firm and in 1876, upon the death of his father, he inherited his father's share of the business. The business was by then known as James Bliss & Co., grocers, ship chandlers, and vessel owners. A partnership agreement from 1883 indicates that Israel E. Decrow had also been a partner in 1876, and that Decrow and James F. Bliss were equal partners starting in 1883.

According to the 1915 *Who's Who In New England*, James F. Bliss was also the director of the Simpson Patent Dry Dock Co. and had been president of some local banks and a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1900-1901. He had been a corporal in the 2nd Regiment Massachusetts Militia and was a member of many organizations. He was a Republican, a Unitarian, and a Mason. He belonged to a number of clubs, including the Boston Yacht Club. He enjoyed billiards, driving, and outdoor sports.

James F. Bliss never married, and had no known children. He died January 23, 1923, still a partner in James Bliss & Company. The executor of his Estate, and seemingly his major heir, was Benjamin B. Perkins of West Roxbury (MA).

Benjamin B. Perkins was born in the Boston area in 1860 (his parents were from Maine), and was a banker, becoming chairman of the board of the Commercial Security National Bank of Boston by 1927. He never married, and most of his life lived in the Boston area with his older sisters and servants. At the time of this group of papers, he was living at 1 Emmons Road, West Roxbury. Upon the death of Bliss, Perkins evidently hired lawyer Charles C. Blaney to do the work of the Estate. Perkins died in November, 1929, about a year after the final resolution of the *Hattie Dunn* claim.

Charles C. Blaney was born in Boston in 1868, and was married in 1900 at Boston to Mabel A. Wood. His law office was in Boston, and he lived at the time of these papers in Waban with his wife, two children, and maids, one of whom was from Maine.

Israel Emerson Decrow was born at Lincolnville (ME) on May 29, 1844. He married Carrie L. Russell in 1888 and they had a daughter, Marion L., in 1891. He was a partner in James Bliss & Co. at least by 1876, according to the 1883 partnership agreement between him and James F. Bliss. When James F. Bliss died in 1923, Decrow purchased Bliss's share of the firm and continued operation on his own, still under the name James Bliss and Company. His daughter Marion lived with him, unmarried, until his death on November 21, 1931. She appears to have taken over the company on his death, being listed in the 1932 Boston directory as the president and treasurer of James Bliss & Company. At the time of the 1940 census she was still running or working for the company.

James Bliss & Co. appears to have continued operation as a marine business into the 1980s, although no longer a traditional chandlery. It is believed to have been absorbed into another marine business and the name changed. The end is vague, however, and the company is easily confused with other marine businesses like John Bliss & Co., James Bliss Marine, and another James Bliss & Co. started in 2010.

The tern or three-masted schooner *Hattie Dunn* was built in 1884 at the Dunn & Elliot yard in Thomaston (ME). Dunn & Elliot operated her in the coasting trade until she was sunk in 1918 by a German U-Boat. Additional information may be found in MS-73.

Scope and Content Notes

The largest part of this collection concerns attempts to evaluate James F. Bliss's portion of the partnership of James Bliss & Company at the time of his death on January 23, 1923. There are copies of letters from lawyer Blaney to various people asking for the fair market value of shares in specific vessels, confirmation of the existence of particular vessels, or the indebtedness of

vessels. There are the letters received in response. There are many pages of notes and accounts listing assets and liabilities, accounts receivable and funds received, stocks and bonds held and their values, insurance obligations, values of vessel shares and accounts with various marine companies. There are also a series of dividend statements for schooners.

There are a series of agreements relating to the partnership and its dissolution through Bliss's death. There is a copy of the 1883 agreement between Bliss and Decrow, an original of the agreement between Perkins and Decrow for the continuing of the business under the sole ownership of Decrow, and an agreement regarding the sale of Bliss's vessel property by Perkins to Arthur Willis of Boston.

There is also a series of correspondence and other documents relating to the war claims regarding the sinking of the schooner *Hattie Dunn* by a German U-Boat in 1918. These proceedings dragged on for some time, and were not finally settled until the Settlement of War Claims Act of 1928. A particular difficulty was proving that shareholder James F. Bliss was a U.S. citizen, since he was born as James F. Very, and his adoption papers were difficult to find.

Folder List

Folder#	
1	Correspondence, incoming, 1923-1924
2	Correspondence, outgoing, 1923-1926
3	Correspondence, schooner[3] *Hattie Dunn,* incoming, 1925-1928
4	Correspondence, schooner[3] *Hattie Dunn,* outgoing, 1925-1928
5	Agreements, 1883-1924
6	Claims documents, schooner[3] *Hattie Dunn,* 1928
7	Dividend statements, various vessels, 1923
8	Accounts and other financial records, 1922-1928 and undated